



# American Citizen Services Newsletter

## ~ Winter 2013 ~

Thank you to the more than 500 Americans who attended the February 19 town hall at the Ambassador's residence. We appreciate the time you invested, and the insightful questions raised during the discussion. For those who were unable to attend, here are some important highlights from the various speakers.

### Ambassador Robert F. Godec

The general election on March 4 will be the most important since independence. It will be an important test of Kenya's progress. It is the first national election since the post-election violence that claimed over 1,000 lives and displaced 600,000 people, and the first under Kenya's new constitution. The government of Kenya, the international community, and civil society are working hard to ensure this election is free, that it is fair and that it is peaceful.

The U.S. Government is an active partner in this process. Since 2010, we have contributed more than \$35 million to support electoral reform, civic education, and elections preparation. We have also provided more than \$90 million to strengthen civil society, support constitutional reform, and promote youth leadership and empowerment. This support contributes significantly to the goal of free, fair, and peaceful elections next month.

Of course, this is a Kenyan election. At the end of the day, the responsibility for this election rests squarely on Kenyan shoulders. Our task is to assist Kenya in building institutions and capabilities, and to speak, publicly and privately, in support of our values and beliefs. As President Obama said in his message to the Kenyan people just two weeks ago, "The choice of who will lead Kenya is up to the Kenyan people. The United States does not endorse any candidate for office, but we do support an election that is peaceful and reflects the will of the people."

In light of Kenya's last national elections, which resulted in widespread unrest, the Embassy is taking the potential for violence with these elections seriously. Suspected political attacks have already occurred in some regions of the country; Tana River is one example. Furthermore, extremist groups such as al-Shabaab may use violence to exploit election-related tensions. It is important for us to heed the lessons of Kenya's recent history, but at the same time to judge matters by the facts on the ground today. We will all need to proceed with caution, particularly in the weeks ahead.



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**American Citizen Services Kenya**

### **Ambassador Robert F. Godec, continued**

Finally, the Embassy will set up an election monitoring operation around the time of the election. It will operate 24 hours a day for the period it needs to. If you see something that concerns you, I would encourage you to contact us at [enrolledinkenya@state.gov](mailto:enrolledinkenya@state.gov). We will be in touch with the Kenyan government about any issues that we see as the election proceeds.

If you received an invitation to be here today, it is because you registered with the U.S. Embassy. Registering with the Embassy is the first and most important step in preparing for any crisis. In order to provide assistance and information, we need to be able to reach you. We believe that thousands of other U.S. citizens have not yet registered. Please encourage your friends and acquaintances to sign up through the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program, which can be found on the Embassy's website. Enrollment provides us the information needed to assist American citizens in an emergency. This is particularly important because, in the days ahead as the election unfolds, we may well want to provide you with updates and further information.



Consul General  
Elizabeth Jordan

### **Elizabeth Jordan, Consul General**

The U.S. Embassy currently has no specific threat information that Americans in Kenya are at risk or would be targeted during any election-related violence. The Embassy has personnel in many areas of Kenya, including many potential hot spots, and at this moment, none are reporting credible threats against Americans. However, the political situation in Kenya is volatile and could change with little or no warning. Be assured that we have detailed contingency plans for all levels of civil disturbance, with responses ranging from sheltering in place to full-scale evacuation. Thankfully, at this time, an evacuation scenario does not appear likely.

## **John Haynes, Political Counselor**

The March 4 elections are an historic opportunity for Kenya. The elections are the capstone of major reforms agreed to by the coalition government in the wake of violence following the 2007 elections. There has been steady progress on these reforms, including adoption of a new constitution, ensuring greater independence of the judiciary and the police, and political devolution.

### **Some of the challenges for the 2013 elections:**

- The competition between the two main presidential candidates has historical connections that go back to independence, and competition between these two political dynasties raises the stakes of the elections. The fact that one candidate and his running mate have been indicted by the ICC for crimes against humanity further increases the stakes;
- With devolution and the much larger number of elected positions to be decided, this is the most complex election in Kenya's history.
- Security concerns based on the violence of 2007-2008 and threats from the terrorist group al-Shabaab create challenges for the Kenyan police to adequately cover 33,000 polling stations while also being able to respond to specific security incidents.

### **Some positive developments since the 2007 elections, which will help avoid a repeat of violence:**

- The new constitution and its implementing legislation have created stronger institutions to better distribute power and decision-making and monitor and deter hate speech;
- Civil society, including the private sector and media, are actively engaged in peace messaging, civic and voter education and prevention of violence;
- The judiciary has greater independence and is prepared to quickly resolve election disputes;
- Police reform, while in its early stages, provides greater independence and accountability;
- The political candidates have pledged to accept election results or resolve any disputes through the courts;
- There are many more layers of early warning systems and monitoring for potential violence, including district peace committees, civil society groups, constitutional committees and others;
- Advances in social media monitoring and platforms help provide a means of early warning for potential problem areas;
- The U.S. and others in the international community have contributed over \$130 million in support for the elections, more than ten times the amount provided in preparations for the 2007 elections.

On balance, new institutions, processes and safeguards are in place to help ensure free, fair and peaceful elections. The U.S. has played an important role in supporting these positive developments.

## Marian Cotter, Regional Security Officer

Kenya's last national election, in December 2007, resulted in widespread unrest and violence. As a result of the civil disturbance, there were disruptions in transportation for periods of time, which resulted in sporadic fuel, food and cash shortages, which affected everyone, even those far from violent incidents.

We can expect rallies, demonstrations, and sporadic outbreaks of election-related violence throughout the election period, which may not be completely resolved until May or even June.

The good news is there were no past incidents of election-related violence in Kenya that targeted Americans, nor is there expectation of any this time. However, you can always find yourself in the wrong place at the wrong time, especially with more than 30,000 polling stations open around the country on Election Day. Avoid polling stations, political demonstrations, and other protests. Common criminals could also take advantage of civil disorder to commit crimes while police resources are stretched.

Monitor local media for information; however, please keep in mind the 24/7 news cycle, which may repeat the same shocking headlines or camera footage over and over. Keep your relatives back home in the States, who may be watching CNN, informed of the reality of your specific situation.



Ambassador Robert  
Godec and Deputy  
Chief of Mission Isiah

Political Counselor  
John Haynes



## John Bush, American Citizen Services Chief

We want to reassure American citizens that we're taking the upcoming elections very seriously. For the past year, we've been focusing on improving our emergency services. For instance, we've boosted our social media presence, conducted extensive training, visited key emergency service providers, quadrupled our number of contacts, improved our communications, and conducted outreach events with many American organizations.

At this point, we **do not** anticipate an evacuation due to the elections. Even during the height of the 2007 post-election violence, we did not initiate an evacuation. However, you should be prepared to shelter in place for up to 72 hours. Also, be sure your passports are up to date and that your vital documents are together. Discuss your emergency plans with your children.

If a crisis does arise in Kenya, it's important that you understand the Embassy's role. We do not have the resources or jurisdiction to provide personal security. The Marines cannot come to the rescue. Instead, we will coordinate with local emergency responders to assist you. Considering this, please use good judgment in coming weeks. Our primary job is to provide information to equip you in making wise decisions. We will be pushing out information throughout the election period, so follow us on Twitter and Facebook. We highly recommend the Kenya Red Cross Twitter feed, as well.